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ABSTRACT

This brief for parents discusses the transition of students with disabilities from the structured environment of school to the post-school world and transition requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997. It begins by explaining the importance of transition planning and decision-making and the need for parents, students, educators, and community service providers to work together to support the student in planning for and achieving his or her adult goals. Requirements under IDEA are then described and include: (1) beginning at age 14, determining what instruction and educational experiences will help the student prepare for the transition from school to adult life; (2) beginning at age 16, including a statement of needed transition services for the student in the Individualized Education Program (IEP); and (3) special factors that the IEP team is required to consider, including behavior that impedes learning, limited English proficiency, Braille needs, communication needs, and assistive technology. The role of the IEP transition team and the specific roles of students, parents, special education and general education teachers, other school personnel, and other service agencies, are described. (CR)

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Parent Brief

Promoting effective parent involvement in secondary education and transition.

July 2002

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IDEA 1997 Transition Issues

The IEP for Transition-Aged Students

As a parent of a student with a disability you are probably concerned about your son or daughter as he or she makes the transition from the structured environment of school to the post-school world and all of the difficult life choices that entails. The services and supports your student needed in school may continue to be needed when he or she leaves school to pursue postsecondary education, job training, work, personal and social relationships, involvement in the community, and independent living.

From the time your child begins receiving special education services, his or her Individualized Education Program (IEP) guides his or her education. During the transition years, your son or daughter's IEP must contain specific transition services defined by The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 (IDEA) regulations. The transition plan will lay the path toward your child's young adulthood. It must reflect his or her choices, preferences, and needs in the areas of education and training, employment, adult living arrangements, and community experiences. IDEA requires that parents and students be involved in all aspects of transition planning and decision making. To participate effectively, and to ensure that your student receives appropriate educational services, it is important that you and your son or daughter become familiar with the transition requirements of IDEA. Parents, students, educators, and community service providers must work together to support the student in planning for and achieving his or her adult goals.

The transition plan will lay the path toward your child's young adulthood.

IDEA Transition Requirements

IDEA requires that transition planning begin at the earliest age appropriate. For each student with a disability, beginning at age 14 (or younger, if determined appropriate by the IEP team), the IEP must include a statement of the student's transition service needs that focuses on the student's course of study (such as advanced academic courses, technical training, or intensive employment preparation). Thus, beginning at age 14, the IEP team, in identifying annual goals and services for a student, must determine what instruction and educational experiences will help the student prepare for the transition from school to adult life. For example, if a student's transition goal is to secure a job, a transition service need might be enrolling in a career development class to explore career options and specific jobs related to that career.

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The IEP Transition Team

According to IDEA Section 300.29—

(a) Transition services means a coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that-

(1) Is designed within an outcome-oriented process, that promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation;

(2) Is based on the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests; and

(3) Includes-

(i) Instruction;

(ii) Related services;

(iii) Community experiences;

(iv) The development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives; and

(v) If appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

(b) Transition services for students with disabilities may be special education, if provided as specially designed instruction, or related services, if required to assist a student with a disability to benefit from special education.

A statement of transition service needs should relate directly to the student's goals after high school and show how planned activities are linked to these goals.

The law requires that the IEP team begin no later than age 14 to address the student's need for instruction that will assist him or her in preparing for transition. Beginning at age 16 (or younger, if determined appropriate by the IEP team), the IEP must contain a statement of needed transition services for the student, including, if appropriate, a statement of interagency responsibilities. This includes a coordinated set of activities with measurable outcomes that will move the student from school to post-school activities.

The IEP must be updated annually, or more often when needed. If the student is not making expected progress toward the annual goals and in the general curriculum, the team must meet and revise the IEP. Schools must report to parents on the progress of a child with a disability at least as frequently as they report on the progress of nondisabled children. Progress reports can help determine whether or not revisions to the IEP are needed.

The IEP Transition Team

Transition planning works best when students are actively involved. Family members and other adults also play important roles in this long-term planning. Teachers, administrators, and support agencies work with the student and family to reach the goals.

The IEP transition team relies on data from many sources to make decisions. Assessments, observation, testing, medical evaluation, and family history may be used to determine eligibility for adult services. Continued eligibility for services likewise relies on reevaluation and input from teachers and family.

All the professionals who work with the student must be knowledgeable about the student's IEP. They must understand their responsibilities and the specific accommodations, modifications, and supports that must be provided for the student in accordance with the IEP. This means that the IEP must be accessible to each of the student's teachers and all other service providers who implement any portion of the IEP, even if they do not attend the

transition IEP meetings (for example, guidance counselors, vocational educators, social workers, psychologists). The IEP transition team involves the participation of several individuals, which may include the students, parents/guardians, general and special education teachers, related services personnel, counselors, administrators, adult service providers, employers, postsecondary personnel, and other personal or professional support networks. The following is a description of the roles of the key individuals involved in the transition planning process.

Students

Students, no matter what or how significant their disability may be, are the most important people involved in transition. They should be as actively engaged as possible in all aspects of their transition process. The IEP team must specifically invite the student to attend any IEP meeting in which the team will be considering transition service needs or needed transition services. The transition planning process should be done *with*, not *for* the student. The student's IEP transition plan must be based on his or her individual needs, choices, and preferences with goals that reflect what the student is interested in doing now and what he or she will want and need when high school is finished. Preparing together for IEP meetings gives students and parents the opportunity to identify and discuss the student's goals for the future. If the student does not attend, schools must ensure that the student's preferences and interests are considered when developing the IEP transition plan.

Students, no matter what or how significant their disability may be, are the most important people involved in transition. The transition planning process should be done WITH, not FOR the student.

Parents

Parents know their child better than anyone else and will be the one constant factor throughout their child's transition from school to adulthood. Their commitment to the IEP transition team is the key to making their child's transition to adult living a successful one. They bring a wealth of information about their child, which has great significance when developing a plan for transition. Parents provide knowledge about their child's interests and medical history, as well as about their child's behaviors at home and in the community. Their observations, along with the expression of the family's values, provide the transition IEP team with a greater understanding of what services may be necessary and appropriate. Parents must be invited to IEP transition meetings and informed prior to the meeting that the discussion will involve transition issues.* After the IEP is developed, parents must be given a free copy of their child's IEP without having to request it.* *If the student has reached the age of majority, the student can invite parents to attend, but the school is not required to invite the parents or guardians.*

Educators and Adult Service Agencies

Special Education and General Education Teachers

IDEA requires at least one special education teacher or provider of the child to be a member of the IEP transition team. The team must also include at least one general education teacher of the child if the student is or may be participating in general education. The entire IEP team determines what services the student needs, such as positive behavioral interventions, supplementary aids, program modifications, assistive technology devices and services, and support for the teachers who serve the student.

Other School Personnel

IDEA requires a representative from the school district who is knowledgeable about the availability of resources of the public agency to attend the IEP meetings. This person must be qualified to provide or supervise the provision of specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of children with disabilities and be knowledgeable about the general curriculum. When tests, assessments, or new evaluations are being discussed, someone who can interpret what the results say about the student's instructional needs must be at the meeting.

Other Service Agencies

The student's IEP should include any needed transition services from outside agencies, such as vocational rehabilitation, county services, and postsecondary programs. Adult agencies whose services link school experiences with employment, future education or training, and independent living opportunities should be invited to IEP transition meetings. These personnel could include representatives from residential facilities, mental health workers, county case managers, vocational rehabilitation counselors, or past or current employers. This is a critical component of transition planning. Many public and private agencies that offer adult services have eligibility criteria and waiting lists. The procedures used in each adult service system differ from school procedures. Some services from these agencies can begin before the student graduates. A smooth transition to adult services is more likely to occur if representatives from adult agencies are included in the transition IEP as early as possible.

What is the difference between the regulations at age 14 and at age 16?

- **At age 14 planning must start. The student's post-school goals should be developed and transition service needs identified. The needs may include a course of study and a year-by-year plan to achieve goals after graduation. The IEP team must determine what instruction and educational experiences will help the student prepare for transition from high school to post-school life.**
- **By age 16, the needed transition services must be implemented. (NOTE: Some states have regulations that implement transition services at age 14 rather than 16.) Services could include instruction and related services, community experiences, vocational evaluation, employment, and other activities involved in adult living. A statement of interagency responsibilities should be included as well as needed links to other agency services. The IEP should be updated at least annually. The IEP team should also monitor the student's high school program to be sure the student completes all graduation requirements that are identified as appropriate in the student's IEP.**

Special Factors

If an outside agency fails to provide the service agreed to in the IEP, the school must call a meeting to identify alternate strategies to meet the transition objectives set forth in the IEP. IDEA does not relieve a participating adult agency of its responsibility to provide or pay for any transition services it would otherwise provide to people with disabilities who meet the agency's eligibility criteria.

Other Individuals

Parents may invite anyone with knowledge or special expertise regarding the child to be on the IEP team. Such persons may be a friend or relative, an advocate, or an employer. IDEA regulations provide that the person who issues the invitation determines whether that individual has knowledge or expertise that may be helpful in the IEP meeting. Parents, the student, and the school may invite whomever they choose.

Special Factors for the IEP Team to Consider

The regulations [Section 300.346(a)(2)] also require that special factors be considered in the following areas:

- *Behavior that Impedes Learning.* In the case of a child whose behavior interferes with his or her learning or that of others, consider appropriate strategies and supports, including positive behavioral interventions, to address that behavior.
- *Limited English Proficiency.* In the case of a child with limited English proficiency, consider the language needs of the child as those needs relate to the child's IEP.
- *Braille Needs.* In the case of a child who is blind or visually impaired, provide for instruction in Braille unless the IEP team determines that it is not appropriate for the child.
- *Communication Needs.* Consider the communication needs of the child, and in the case of a child who is deaf or hard of hearing, consider the child's language and communication needs and opportunities for communication with others, along with the full range of needs.
- *Assistive Technology.* Consider whether the child requires assistive technology devices and services.

Conclusion

For 25 years, IDEA has been an important law for students receiving special education and related services. As a parent, you can do much to help your child with a disability move through their transition years. You can become familiar with the federal regulations and the procedures used in your state and school district. Appropriate transition services will enable your student to develop the skills he or she needs for independent living. With knowledge of IDEA, you and your son or daughter can become stronger self-advocates, and you can help your young adult develop skills needed for the future.

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Access Parent Briefs and other NCSET materials on-line at: http://ici.umn.edu/ncset.

NCSET works to increase the capacity of national, state, and local agencies and organizations to improve secondary education and transition results for youth with disabilities and their families. NCSET is headquartered at the University of Minnesota, and is a partnership of six organizations, including PACER Center. NCSET:

- Coordinates national resources that connect policymakers, administrators, professionals, educators, employers, parents, and youth with disabilities to information and useful resources;
- Hosts capacity building institutes and workshops, national summits, national teleconference calls, and additional training opportunities;
- Develops research-to-practice tools for everyday use; and
- Provides technical assistance and outreach.

PACER works with NCSET to represent family perspectives and disseminate information to a national network of federally funded parent centers and the families they serve.

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